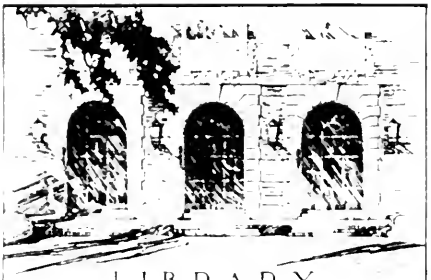

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A VOICE FROM THE DEEP.

A Funeral Sermon at Sea,

BY THE

REV. G. H. MASON, M.A.,

OF SIDNEY COLL., CAMBRIDGE, AND NEW CARISBROOKE, NATAL.

On the Death of Mrs. Catharine Gysin, Wife of a Brother Minister of the Gospel, returning to Europe, after thirty years' labour in the Mission Field.

"*Straightway Jesus spake to them saying: Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid.*"—Matt. xiv. 27.

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A VOICE FROM THE DEEP.

It is a great blessing for the true Christian to be able to recognise the hand of a tender Father, and the voice of a loving Saviour, in moments of trial or danger. And it is a still greater blessing to have a clear proof that that voice is speaking in tones of love, and not in displeasure, or even anger. To feel that it is the hand of a Friend, a well-tried Friend, working some all-wise purpose, in those heavy dispensations of Providence which seem to be laid on His most tried and faithful followers, from time to time. A purpose akin to that for which the Saviour Himself was content to endure the cross and grave—for the one purpose of making it the call of God unto the Godless—of awakening careless slumberers to the danger of their state in God's sight; and of bringing before them the joy and assurance which Christian relatives possess of meeting again their departed friends, in the Redeemer's kingdom, beyond the grave, freed from all stain of sin by the Saviour's death; and raised to a higher, perfect, and sinless state of existence, in the actual presence of the risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.

"It is I, be not afraid!" says that same Saviour to us Christians, who have just parted with our dear sister. We feel, in St. Paul's words (Phil. i. 23,) that it is better for her to depart and be with Christ—a faithful, consistent, confiding servant to the last—than to remain amongst us for a season longer. O, may her example not be lost on us! In the midst of tears may we feel that that voice, "It is I, be not afraid," is a consolation we may confidently take to ourselves; a consolation which, as Christians, we cannot afford to part with; a consolation which money could not purchase, nor any earthly greatness secure; but a consolation founded on our Saviour's unchangeable promises, and sealed to us by the blood of the Covenant; even the consolation of knowing, and feeling, that the Saviour's blood is all-sufficient for the cleansing of every stain of sin; and that

that cleansing is freely extended to all who have lived in His constant service, and died in full reliance on the bountifulness of His love and mercy.

And what are those promises which especially apply to us mourners to-day? Why, that she who has spent her strength in the mission-field, and ended her days afar from her native land, shall receive a Crown of glory at her Saviour's hand. For no man hath left country, or home, or friends, for His sake, who shall not receive a hundredfold more in this present life; and, in the world to come, life everlasting. (Luke xviii. 30.) That the man or woman who gives the cup of cold water to one of Christ's little ones, for His sake, shall in no wise lose his or her reward. (Matt. x. 42.) Or, again, that whosoever doeth the will of God, the same is esteemed by the Lord Jesus as a brother, or sister, or mother. (Mark iii. 35.) From which, and similar promises, we rest assured that the affliction which has just befallen us is, really, the voice—the same voice, in another form, which spake to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee—saying to our beloved brother in the ministry, "It is I, be not afraid!" It was I who ordered the course of thy faithful helpmate, in early years, and led her to a knowledge of Salvation. It was I who gave her grace, cheerfully to employ her time in gathering young lambs into the fold of Christianity. It was I who first taught her to pray, and helped her to live as became an heir of salvation. It was I, who stretched out my hand to save Peter from sinking, who have so often saved thee, and her, from bodily dangers, and spiritual assaults! And, *now*, it is I, be not afraid, who have stretched out my hand to take her to myself! To rest from her labours and receive that blessed recognition, "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." (Matt. xxv. 21.)

The history of the portion of Scripture, from which our text is taken, is full of instruction. Our Saviour, it appears, had been working that great miracle of the loaves and fishes. Immediately afterwards He sent His disciples across the Sea of Galilee, in their little ship; whilst He Himself went up into a high mountain, apart, to pray. But, about midnight, a heavy storm arose: so that the little ship, with the disciples, "was tossed with waves in the midst of the sea. When, lo! they beheld Jesus coming to them, walking upon the sea." And, of course, the disciples were terrified:

thinking it was a spirit; and they cried out, under the sudden impulse of fear.

But there was no need for fear. It was no other than Jesus Himself coming to the assistance of His disciples; and forthwith He spake, saying, "It is I, be not afraid."

Before proceeding further, let us apply the teaching of the text thus far. It is the same Jesus whose hand and word rules over sea and land, now, as from the beginning. He who worked the miracle with the loaves and fishes is the same Lord who has fed and provided for each of us all our lives through. He, who sent forth His disciples in their frail bark, to contend with the stormy winds and waves, is the same Saviour who, for His all-wise purposes, has placed an immortal soul in each one of our frail bodies; and has sent us forth to combat with the storms of life and the waves of sin, those old waves which have been rolling from the earth's foundation, and will roll till the new heaven and the new earth appear in glory.

But whilst we, like the disciples of old, are thus contending with the cares of this life and the wiles of Satan, Christ also has ascended up into His high mountain in heaven, to sit at God's right hand, from which He looks down, and beholds with compassion the afflictions, and trials, and dangers which befal His storm-tossed disciples. There is not one frail vessel that escapes His eye, whether it be the human vessel that conveys the soul on its voyage through life, or the vessels that navigate the actual waves. With grief and pity He looks down on every sin-bound brother or sister. He knows all the evil powers which league together in making war against both saints and sinners. And, if there is one here to-day who has been living in ignorance or forgetfulness of God His Saviour, and of Satan his mortal foe, let this day's sad event, and the subject of our text, awaken him to the reality of the terrible eternity beneath his feet, and the High Captain of our salvation looking down from His throne in heaven. Let it carry home to his heart the question, Were you prepared, had it been you who thus were summoned to quit thy fleshly tabernacle, and meet thy Lord? Into what unknown depths of woe wouldest thou have plunged, if thy frail body had been broken up whilst sailing on, like thoughtless, careless travellers, in any godless ship, which all unexpectedly is caught by some wild hurricane, and overwhelmed, with all her living freight!

Yes! Let this day's solemn funeral service be not only the

voice of Jesus speaking comfortably to His true disciples, but also let it be His voice speaking to the wandering prodigal. Bidding each sin-tossed, weary worldling remember that one friendly eye, and one friendly hand, still cares for his soul—the eye of Jesus, who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Yes, O thoughtless one, the Lord Jesus, who sees all thy life-long sins, and knows all thy temptations, still loves thee! He, too, has been tempted in all respects, like unto thee, yet without sin; and, therefore, He has compassion on thee. He bears on the palms of his hands the prints of those nails, endured as the chastisement of thy sins. He died to reconcile thee thereby, to a justly offended Father. And, therefore, He calls to thee, as well as to me, and to all of us, to avail ourselves of the benefits of His death. He bids us prepare ourselves to meet Him face to face. He speaks from the depths of the ocean; and His unseen hand, allaying the fears and pains of death, proclaims His presence, saying to every true disciple, "It is I, be not afraid." But speaking in solemn words of warning, by this recent, sudden death, to every godless soul, "Prepare to meet thy God!" Who can tell what a day may bring forth to thee?

Continuing the history of the text, we see Peter descending from the ship, to walk on the water, as Jesus walked. But, almost immediately, his faith failed, and he began to sink. Then Peter cried out in earnest, "Lord, save me, or I perish!" And instantly, the Lord stretched out His hand, and held Peter up, till they both were safe within the ship.

Nor did the miracle end there; for, we read, The Lord immediately caused the ship to pass over to the other side of the sea, whither they were bound; and so brought Peter and all the disciples safe to land.

We have a lesson for ourselves in this also. Each one of us has this day heard the solemn voice of warning! Each one must have felt how near the hand of death is at any moment! "In the midst of life we are in death." Naught but our fleeting breath divides us from the countless multitudes of sleeping dead. And it is *now*, now whilst we are made more sensible of death's powerful grasp, that the voice of the Saviour is calling to us to come to Him!—to come out from our former evil habits!—to cast away our old besetting sins!—To trust in His power to open up a new course of life for us, and to make a firm way under our feet, for us to tread the narrow path of life eternal.

And, like Peter, I trust that *many*—nay, all—of us have determined to accept the Saviour's invitation, and, without hesitation, are ready to go to Him,—to go to Him for pardon for all that is past, for help for the time to come, and for salvation in the moment of peril and the hour of death.

But like Peter also, your faith, brethren, will needs be weak at times. You too, like Peter, will feel yourselves sometimes ready to fall away—*beginning* to sink. The difficulty of being a true Christian will sometimes tempt you to despair of ever reaching the arms of Jesus. But, like Peter, cry out, "Lord, save me!" And when the strength of old habits comes like a great wave, then also cry again, "Lord, save me, or I perish." Or, when your own natural weakness and liability to sin makes you fearful without a cause, then also remember the hand of Jesus, readily stretched out to save the too faithless disciple, and take to yourself the rebuke given to Peter? "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" But whatever the weakness, whatever the temptation—whenever you begin to sink, trust not to any power of your own, but remember Peter's way of escape—by looking unto Jesus, and calling to Him, "Lord, save me, or I perish."

And now, dear brethren and fellow-travellers over this ocean, and on the voyage to eternity—in conclusion, let me remind you that you are included in the invitation to "come to Jesus." Think not that Jesus is too high or too holy to reckon you amongst His weak disciples. Hear his own words to you and to me alike:—"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke xiii 5.) And again—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Oh, then, do we feel ourselves worthily lost—lost, if weighed according to our own deservings; lost, if left to struggle with sin and Satan, unaided by the Saviour's ready hand; lost, if summoned to the bar of judgment, unpardoned, and unwashed by the Saviour's cleansing blood—that "blood of the new covenant," of which the Saviour Himself said, when for the first time He administered the Christian Sacrament in the upper chamber at Jerusalem, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins"?

I say, if we feel thus *almost lost*, then let us earnestly cry to our Saviour, "Lord, save us, or we perish!" And if we feel the stain of sin still unwashed from our guilty conscience, then also let us go to His appointed Sacrament of the Lord's

Supper, and there picture to our mind the same Lord graciously speaking to us, and by unseen hand giving us the sacred cup, and saying to us, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. Drink ye all of this." (Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.)

For, remember, dear brethren, just as it was the work of Jesus on earth to save and reclaim perishing sinners; even so it is still His office to call sinners to repentance and salvation by the voice of His ministers, or by the voice of sudden death, or by other solemn calls. There is still joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. And any one of you who this day feels his need of much pardon—his need of a Saviour's intercession with God—his need of a Saviour's ready help, to keep you from falling,—I say, if any one of you this day is led to feel the need of a Saviour, then let me entreat you to go to Him in private earnest prayer, and cry to Him—'Lord, save me, or I perish!" Lord, help me to live my remaining days in Thy service! Lord, help me to pray! Lord, help me to keep Thy sabbaths and Thy commandments! And, in Thy good time, bring me, like Peter, all safe into the fold of Christ, where all is peace and all is safety; where no fears nor tears, no sickness, no pain, no temptation, and no sin can ever mar the perfect happiness of the Saviour's redeemed flock; where, as we read, "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, of redeemed souls, clothed with their resurrection bodies, and washed from all stain of sin by the blood of the Lamb, and arrayed with glory," will ever sing their Saviour's praise, and ascribe to Him the honour due unto His name.

May we be found amongst that happy, glorious throng! May we look forward more and more to that never-ending life of bliss! And as our last breath glides softly forth, may we hear that Saviour's voice saying to us, "It is I; be not afraid"!

Lat. 5° 21′ N., Long. 16° 10′ W.
April 24th, 1870.

London. William Macintosh, 24, Paternoster Row.